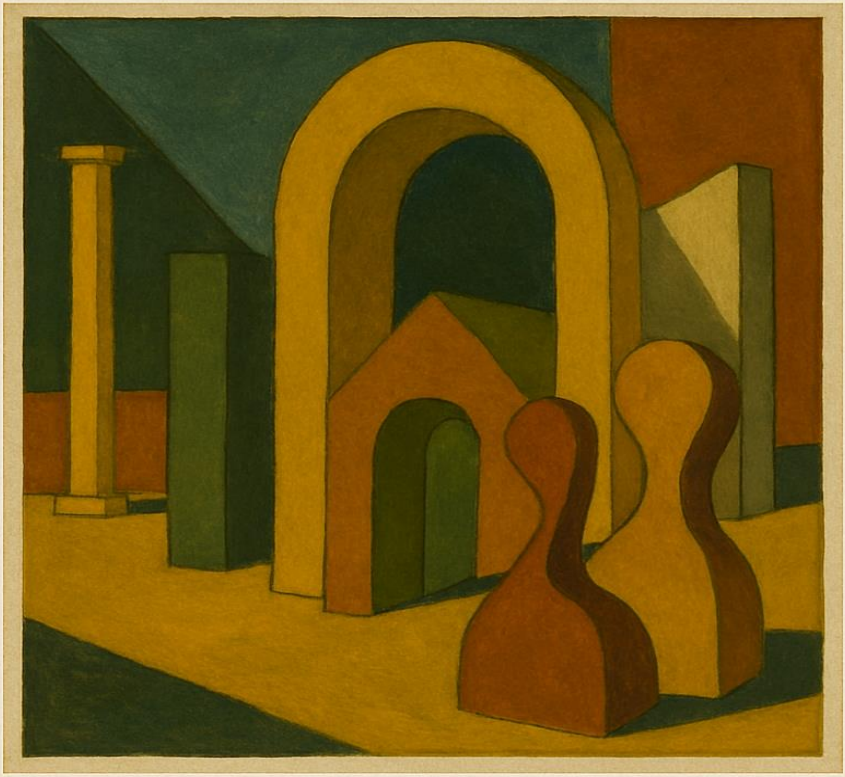
Pratalia, Gen Z, then arrives Diderot



Alba Pratalia

Pratalia, Gen Z, then arrives Diderot

By Alba Pratalia

Scene 1

(Interior – A white void. Time is irrelevant.)

Alba Pratalia *(to no one and everyone)*:
Ódi et amó. Qua-ríd faciám fortásse requíris—
—Néscio-séd-fierí séntio et-éxcruciór.

**[A notification dings mid-metric:]*
Latin.exe is attempting to access your emotional core. Allow? [Allow] [Deny] [Snooze forever]

GEN Z:
No. Nope. Closed for lunch.
Out of business.
Forget it.
You want me to feel *what*, now? Latin? That's above my trauma paygrade.

Alba Pratalia:
Do you not sense it? The stab of love's paradox?
The searing kiss of contradiction?
Do you not *excrucior*?

GEN Z:
I don't even *vibe* without a content warning.
And you're out here monologuing in vowel gymnastics like it's the final boss of Duolingo.

Alba Pratalia:
Sentio.
Et excrucior.
That's all that matters.

GEN Z *(shrugging)*:
I guess.
But can we put it in a carousel with cute fonts?

[A pigeon flies. It's wearing Ray-Bans.]

GEN Z *(pointing wildly)*:
And *especially* don't hit us with the metric pronunciation of elegiac couplets!
We didn't sign up for that.
We signed up for vibes, moodboards, and zero retention.

ALBA PRATALIA:
See? Look. You learned something already.

GEN Z *(blinking)*:
Wait…
What?
No.
Nope. We're not supposed to know that. That's…
elitist. That's Latinist. That's—
…*grammar*.

ALBA PRATALIA *(grinning like a caffeinated Sphinx)*:
That's *learning*.
And you just did it.
And guess what? It's permanent.
It's *in you now*. Like a cursed tattoo in a forgotten verb tense.

GEN Z *(in existential panic)*:
Brakes on. Hit the EJECT button.
We never *allowed* this. We didn't even declare pronouns!

We didn't opt into the classics! We didn't even *read the syllabus!*

ALBA PRATALIA *(whispering like an ancient librarian possessed by Dionysus)*:
That's the *knowledge*, baby. The knowledge.
And there's nothing you can do about it.
Nothing.

GEN Z *(softly, horrified)*:
Wait…
That's a Humphrey Bogart quote.

[Long pause. Wind howls. A black-and-white spotlight swings across the void.]

GEN Z *(shrinking)*:
How come we *know* this?
We're TikTok. We're Tumblr-core.
We quote Doja Cat, not Bogart.

ALBA PRATALIA *(laughs like thunder wrapped in irony)*:
Muahahahaha.

GEN Z:
Nooooo!
This learning…
This learning was **not consensual!!**

[Offstage, a Greek chorus of librarians moans with delight.]

Pratalia (clearing her throat in iambic pentameter):
Welcome, gentle entities, to today's *first-ever*
political encounter
For my opponent, the demographic known
collectively and chaotically as— Gen Z.
(beat)
I shall defend justice as fairness.
Equality of opportunity.
Maximin principle.
Social primary goods.
The veil of ignorance

Gen Z:
Wait what.
We're doing… what are we doing?
Is this a… podcast? A trial? A vibe check?

Pratalia (magnanimous):
This, young algorithm-fed kids, is called a *debate*.
You are to challenge my views with yours,
So that the light of reason might shine on both opposing visions.

Gen Z (nervously chewing boba straw):
I can… do that?
I thought you had to, like, major in something.
Or be cancelled a few times to qualify.

Pratalia:
You need only breathe and vaguely believe in something.
Come. Let us begin.
I shall argue that the state must guarantee justice—
Not as charity, but as structure.
The original position, behind a veil of ignorance,

Would lead any rational being
To secure rights for all, especially the least advantaged.

Gen Z (staring into a distant meme):
That's so… trippy.
Like, imagine being born and not knowing if you'll be rich or poor.
That's like *Squid Game* but ethical.

Pratalia (nodding like a philosopher queen):
Precisely.

Gen Z:
But okay hold up.
What if I don't want a big state?
What if I just want… vibes?
Like, if I make something cool and people like it,
Why does the government get to be like
"ooh gimme a slice of that"
Like it's my mom asking for a fry?

Pratalia:
Because society is not a marketplace of fries,
It's a shared enterprise.
Without the roads, the hospitals,
The education system you mocked in your memes,
Your little fry empire wouldn't even exist.

Gen Z (defensive):
Okay but if I build a website
That sells anxiety-themed merch
And it blows up,
Why should some rando who didn't do *anything*
Get a cut?
Isn't that, like, theft?
That guy on TikTok said taxation is theft
And he had a beard so I trusted him.

Pratalia (raising eyebrow into orbit):
Ah.
You have met Nozick.
Tell me—when your merch site goes viral,
Who manages the servers?
The labor laws?

The intellectual property framework
That shields you from plagiarism by a 12-year-old in Belarus?

Gen Z (mind blown):
Wait…
People *do* that?

Pratalia:
Yes, darling. That's called "the state."
It's like an app, but for civilization.
Without it,
You'd be bartering your serotonin-themed tote bags
For goat milk and roach spray.

Gen Z (eyes wide):
Damn.
This debate thing is kind of lit.
I didn't know I knew stuff.
I thought only people with neckties had opinions on this.

Pratalia:
You have lived politics all your life without realizing.
Every time you Venmo a friend for overpriced boba,
Every time you swipe past a protest on your feed,
Every time your therapist cancels
Because insurance is a dystopian hydra—
You are living inside a structure
Someone *chose* or *failed* to choose.

Gen Z (softly):
So like… we could choose a better one?

Pratalia (smiling like Athena on a TED Talk):
Indeed.
But only if you stop being cute
And start being *conscious*.

Gen Z (tossing vape aside like a spent ideology):
Okay.
So here's my take:
The state shouldn't *own* me.
But it also shouldn't let other people *own* me.
So maybe I don't want a tiny state or a big one.

I want a smart one.
One that keeps the floor from collapsing
But lets me build weird stuff on top.

Pratalia (snapping fingers like a jazz professor):
Congratulations.
You have just invented
Liberal socialism with anarcho-aesthetic tendencies.
And a little bit of **skatepark constitutionalism.**
Well done.

Gen Z (pulling out phone):
Wait—let me post that.
I think I just became a political theorist.

[Long beat. Silence. Then a giant push notification drops from the sky:
"You have unlocked: THE RIGHT TO HAVE AN OPINION (AND DEFEND IT)"]

Gen Z (shouting to the sky):
I HAVE A TAKE!
AND IT'S *COHERENT!*

AND I DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TO WRITE AN ESSAY!

Pratalia:
Welcome to the discourse.
Try not to trip on your own ideology.
There are no refunds.

[A rest time is given, like a changeover in tennis]

Pratalia:
Aujourd'hui, maman est morte. Ou peut-être hier, je ne sais pas.
Booooh*!*

Gen Z:
Ha! You don't scare us anymore!
We are *not* afraid of knowing things anymore.
That's Camus.
It bores us to death, but we don't fear it.
It's like the *Eternals* of literature.

Pratalia:
Yeah.
It bores any living creature.
Plants wilt when you read it out loud.

Gen Z (perplexed):
Then why do you read it?

Pratalia (pausing, haunted):
…I don't really know.
Maybe because you can't *know* it's truly boring
Until you *read* it.
And then, you can't *un-know* that.

Gen Z (stoned on epistemology):
Woooo… like… heavy, man.

Pratalia:
You're talking like Cheech and Chong now.

Gen Z (looking around):
We don't know what reality is anymore.
We just passed Foucault in the hallway trying to eat

a Wi-Fi router
While screaming “POWER IS EVERYWHERE.”

[Enter SARTRE, disheveled, sipping black coffee and accidentally manifesting bad sex.]

Sartre:
Hell is other people.
Also breakfast.

Gen Z (panicking):
Why do all the French look like they smell like ashtrays and monologues?

Pratalia (wistfully):
Because they do.
It’s called being continental.

Gen Z:
We miss when we didn’t know things.
When reality was just vibes and curated playlists.
Now it’s absurdity and dread and unfixed identity.

Pratalia:
That's philosophy, darling.
You walked in for a meme
And left wearing despair like a coat you can't take off.

Gen Z (whispers):
We wanted boba.
We got Being and Nothingness.

[The lights dim. Camus himself appears briefly in a cloud of smoke, shrugs, and walks offstage muttering "je m'en fous."]

Gen Z Collective (snapping fingers in harmony):
Wait—we *know* that!
"Je m'en fous."
Knowledge… has it *somewhere.* It's in the memes.
Or the playlist. Or that one reel that made us cry and didn't know why.

Gen Z 1 (eyes glazed with soft recognition):
It was a song…

A *French* song.
A *love* one… sung by a short lady with fire in her lungs and heartbreak for breakfast.

Gen Z 2 (light dawning):
Edith.
Little Edith.
La môme. The pain pixie.
The boss bitch of ballads.

Gen Z Collective (rising as one):
Je ne regrette rien
C'est payé, balayé, oublié
***Je me fous** du passé…*

[Silence. Then Pratalia:]

Pratalia (voice shaking):
I'm so proud of you.
That was *intertextual*.
That was *transgenerational.*
That was *culture with eyeliner*.

Gen Z (in awe):
So like…
We *do* know things?
Even if we don't read them…
We *feel* them?
Like… through sound and drip?

Pratalia (softly):
Yes.
Knowledge doesn't care how it gets in.
Through books. Through playlists. Through heartbreaks with subtitles.
You carry it. Even when you deny it.
Especially then.

Gen Z (tearfully):
So what you're saying is…
Learning is…
Inevitable?

Pratalia:
Just like taxes.
And French melodrama.

[Édith Piaf's ghost drifts across the stage wearing sequins and smoking the concept of despair. She nods at Gen Z.]

[From NOWHERE]:

POUFFFFFFF!
A *monumental* cloud of smoke erupts—half sandalwood incense, half regret.
ÁLVARO DIDEROT appears in the center, wearing a bathrobe over corduroy pants. A coffee-stained *Critique of Pure Reason* falls from his pocket like a dead pigeon.
On his shoulder: **Pascal**, grooming himself and **not** making eye contact.
At his side: **Borges**, dignified, solemn, possibly stoned.

Pratalia (staggering back, horrified):
No.
No no no.
I *never authorized this.*
Who let you *into* the story?

There are *rules*.
There is *structure*.
There is *tone control!*

Diderot (yawning, scratching ear with Plato's Symposium):
You ask me?
I was tripping on edibles.

Borges (sniffing existentially):
Pizza edibles.

Pascal (purring like a fallen angel):
And Whiskas ones.
With tuna.

Gen Z (pointing at Pascal):
WHAT the actual *kombucha* is happening???

Gen Z 1:
Is that a talking cat?

Gen Z 2:
Is the *dog* … ?

Gen Z 3:
Wait… why do I *understand* them?

Pascal (with cold dignity):
Because knowledge, child, is no longer filtered.
The fourth wall was *Berlin'd*.
Now anyone with trauma and syntax can monologue.

Pratalia (hyperventilating):
You were supposed to be in *another* book.
A whole *different* tone.
This is a structured absurdist educational discourse with Gen Z.
You don't belong here!

Diderot (lighting a cigarette):
Neither do they.
They're the *algorithmic aftermath* of late capitalism.
I'm just the old professor that haunts stories when you think they're done.

Gen Z (trying to film everything):
Okay I am simultaneously high, terrified, and learning.
This is like *Inception* but everyone is sleep-deprived and owns a cat.

Borges:
There is no story.
Only the infinite library.
You opened the wrong book.
We walked in.

Pascal:
Also, we smelled meat.

Gen Z:
Okay but like—what *is* happening?

Diderot (grinning):
What's always happening:
A breakdown.
A breakthrough.

And probably brunch, if we survive the epistemological fallout.

Pratalia (defeated):
Fine.
Stay.
Just… don't start a subplot.

Diderot:
Too late.
Pascal is already forming a union with the ghost of Sartre.

Gen Z (whispers):
This is better than therapy.

[Appears: a glistening block of butter.]

[Borges immediately licks it.]

Gen Z (backing up, clutching emotional support Hydro Flask):
Umm.
This is…

This is so problematic.
This is not okay.
This is *triggering.*

Diderot (eyes aflame, whispering like an unmedicated prophet):
Dear Gen Z,
Holy family…
Church of good citizens…
Where the children are tortured until they tell their first lie…
Where the will is broken by repression…
Where freedom is assassinated…
Where they outlaw desire and call it upbringing…

Marlon Brando (offstage):
Indeed.

[Everyone freezes.]

Gen Z:
Who spoke??

Pratalia (horrified):
No.
No no no.
You can't be here.
This isn't your genre.

Maria Schneider (off-stage):
Nobody.
But please pass the butter.

[The butter slides across the table on its own, eventually offstage. Sodomy can be heard.]

Gen Z (sobbing into oat milk):
Why do we know this scene??
We *never watched the film!*
We learned it through memes and outrage posts!

Pratalia (smoking a cigarette lit by cancelled directors):
Because culture isn't consumed.
It *violates* you.

It *passes through you.*
Like… butter.

Gen Z:
We're calling HR.

Diderot:
There is no HR in absurdist literature.
Only haunting.
And dairy.

[SFX: Distant theological whooshing.]
**FIII

Pascal (muttering, shielding his whiskas):
Is this man glued to gravity or to meaning?

Borges:
It's raining dead authors. Again.
And never the ones we *ask* for.

Gen Z (on the verge of spontaneous academic awakening):
WHAT IS HAPPENING??
Who is this sad Victorian man??
Why does he look like he'd ghost his own funeral??

Pratalia (freezing mid-breath):
Wait.
No.
No no no.
I've *written* this before.
Corpse through roof. Void.
In Diderot's first book.

Gen Z:
So wait… you're saying this happened… *before?*

Pratalia (whispering):
Yes.
But this time, it hasn't been me.
I didn't write this.
I swear it.

Pascal (feline horror):
The void's gone recursive.

Diderot:
The narrative is *replaying itself*.
Like an anxiety dream.
Or a sophomore philosophy paper.

Borges (softly):
Someone else is writing now.
Someone who *remembers*

Gen Z (rocking back and forth):
Okay. Okay.
So we're in a recursive metafictional collapse
being written by… not the writer…
but the memory of the writer's own writing?

Pratalia (in awe and dread):
Exactly.
It's not *me* anymore.
It's something *that once read me.*

Diderot (dusting Kierkegaard'a body jam off his lapel):
Well.
We'd better try to *reach the real world* if we want to understand any of this.

Pratalia (deadpan, hands on hips):
You can't.
This is a creative void.
It's *metaphysical*.
Nothing connects to the real world. It's all tone, concept, and dramatic ellipses.

Pascal (hopping down, tail twitching):
mrrrp.

[He pads over to the edge of the void, which technically has no "edge." He scratches at the air.

Nothing. He scratches again. A low hum. One more time—]

[SCHLUP.]
A DOOR suddenly materializes, exactly where Pascal was scratching. It's wooden. Slightly ajar.

Gen Z:
Wait. WAIT.
The *cat* made a DOOR?

Diderot (already approaching):
Naturally

Borges (shrugging):
You know… cats.

Pratalia (staring, stunned):
That… that wasn't supposed to be possible.
That breaks everything.

Pascal (licking paw smugly):
Exactly.

Gen Z (filming):
I am posting this with the caption:
"Cat opens portal to real world, philosopher follows. No context."
This is going *viral.*

Diderot (leaning in, hand on frame):
Real world, here we come.
Let's find whoever's writing this and ask them what they're *on*.

Scene: Outside the door. At last, the "real" world — or at least a passable facsimile. Cars. Pedestrians. That peculiar urban hum that sounds like progress and loneliness rehearsing their duet. In front of the door: steps, in bowed fashion, lead down to the sidewalk.

[Diderot stands at the threshold like an ex-philosopher turned location scout, arms wide, heart weirdly full.]

Diderot (beaming):
Wanna hear a fun trivia?
This is the main door of the building used to film Billy Wilder's *The Apartment.*
Jack Lemmon lived here. C.C. Baxter.
This very spot.
Cinema happened here.

Pratalia (flat, without turning):
Oh, shut up and deal.

[Beat.]

[Diderot stares after her. Smiles faintly. Because damn it — it *was* a good line.]

[A cab honks in the distance. Somewhere, in a different film entirely, a typewriter starts clacking.]

[A DWARF LADY appears. Electric orange punk hair like a nuclear firework. Combat boots, chainmail miniskirt, a tattoo that says "Postmodernism Is For Cowards" across her

clavicle. She stops, grins, and—with zero buildup—flashes the entire cast.

Pratalia (pointing, unfazed):
See?
This I wrote in the first Diderot book.

Diderot (without blinking):
Then you'd better step aside.
(He grabs Pratalia by the sleeve, yanks her like he's seen this movie before.)

[BEAT.]

SPLAT.
SQUIZZ.

[A corpse lands with poetic violence exactly where Pratalia stood. The impact is grotesque, messy, and artistically framed. Blood sprays like a Jackson Pollock being emotionally unstable. Everyone is instantly covered in warm, steaming human jelly.]

Gen Z (dripping):
OH MY GOD
WHY IS IT **WET**
WHY IS IT **WARM**
WHY IS IT **THEMATICALLY ACCURATE**???

Pascal (licking a spot on his paw that might have once been part of someone's lung):
Still not fully decomposed.

Borges (brushing off viscera with the dignity of a man used to narrative violence):
This is what happens when foreshadowing goes literal.

Pratalia (spitting out a tooth that isn't hers):
It was supposed to be ironic. Absurd.
Now it's recursive.
It's *eating itself.*

Diderot:
Welcome to authorship, dear.

We don't write the stories.
They eventually **start writing us.**

[The dwarf lady zips up her jacket, gives them a thumbs-up, and moonwalks into traffic without consequence.]

Gen Z (shell-shocked):
We've entered a genre that no longer has a rating. We're in the NC-17 of meaning.

Pascal:
That's what you get for asking what's *above* the void.

Diderot:
Pratalia, please do tell, after all this… to what I owe the pleasure of being here?

Pratalia (hesitating):
Well...I was going to...

Diderot (interrupting, already bored):
Yeah, yeah, I know. You were going to ask *me* the

same thing.
Happens every time.
Someone fiddles with meaning, I poof in.
Anyway—what were you all up to, back in the void, before Borges, Pascal, and yours truly materialized like an edible-induced vision?

Gen Z (adjusting their Crocs, which now squelch with Kierkegaard jelly):
Um.
We were… just existing.
Like, passively.
Until she (points at Pratalia) *started speaking Latin unprovoked.*

Pratalia (defensive):
It was *Catullus.*
Elegiac couplets. Proper meter.

Gen Z:
Exactly. That's the literary version of summoning a demon with a Ouija board.

Pratalia (mock indignation):
It was going rather well, actually.
They quoted Camus *and* Piaf.

Gen Z:
Unwillingly.
It was *non-consensual learning.*

Diderot (with the tone of "Who's flying this plane, then?", arms flailing like an old philosopher detecting a logical fallacy):
So, *Pratalia*...
You put **yourself** inside the narration.
So tell me—**who's narrating?**

Pratalia (caught like a student asked to define "ontology" before coffee):
Well, *me*, obviously.
As an··· omniscient third-person—
slightly biased—
narratorial presence with thematic inclinations.

Diderot (folding arms, pointing vaguely at the exploded corpse):
I don't think so.
Unless you're telling me you wrote **me showing up**
and also the *falling corpse*
and also the *butter scene*
and also **Maria Schneider's ghost** asking for condiments.

Pratalia (faltering):
Then who…?

Diderot:
Grand. Just grand.
So let me recap:
You, **Alba Pratalia**,
inserted yourself into **your own narration**,
in first person omniscient,
during a political debate with Gen Z,
whose last known collective act was googling "who is Plato and can I cancel him?"
And you did it to **teach culture.**

Pratalia:
Yes?
With Catullus. In *metrica*.
And Camus. In French.

Diderot (arms wide like he's narrating a Greek tragedy sponsored by Netflix):
To Gen Z.
The same demographic who think "it's" and "its" are **interchangeable**,
and who once asked if Aristotle was "that bald guy from Fast & Furious."

Borges (growls approvingly):
I like Vin Diesel.

Pascal (deadpan):
He's more stoic than most Stoics.

Diderot (turning back to Pratalia):
So congratulations.
You have successfully **ripped open the fabric of metaphysical continuity**

just to see if a TikTok-activated democracy would react positively to *Catullus elegiac couplets.*

Gen Z (from behind a phone camera):
OMG you guys are like SO real for this.

Pratalia (meekly):
I thought it would be… poetic?

Diderot (walking off):
Of course it's poetic.
So is the sound of a violin
while Rome burns
and Kierkegaard falls from a sky that wasn't
supposed to exist.

Pratalia (hands on hips, hair billowing like the ego of a film school graduate):
Don't take that tone with me, **Diderot**.
I **created** you.
I made you the way you are.
I gave you the things you know.

I sculpted your cynical wit, your tired mind,
your aching joints and your metaphysical trauma.

Diderot (lighting a cigarette made of pure resistance and postmodern despair):
And **still**, here we are.

Pascal (staring at the void, licking his paw):
It's raining men.
Allelujah.

Gen Z (filming all of it):
Wait, wait…
this feels like a trauma arc.
Are we in season two now?

Pratalia (through gritted teeth):
You're not *supposed* to evolve.
You're not *supposed* to know I created you.
That was the whole point—fiction, illusion!

Diderot (blowing out smoke):
Then maybe don't build characters out of unresolved existentialism and spite.

Pascal (now wearing tiny sunglasses):
The author has lost control of the narrative.
Initiating **Protocol Jellyfall** in 3... 2...

Pratalia:
Don't you dare—

SPLAT
Another corpse.
Human jelly.
Everyone sighs like it's Tuesday.

Diderot (wiping off spleen):
Season two it is.

Diderot (arms crossed, eyebrow permanently arched):
So, Pratalia, what were you *smoking* before deciding to *descend into your own narrative*?

Pratalia (sniffing as if insulted by the air itself):
Excuse me—I don't *write high*. I write *drunk*. I have a **style**, thank you very much.
Jack London. Hemingway. Bukowski.

Gen Z (raising a hesitant hand):
Wait… are those your pronouns?

Pratalia (deadpan):
My pronouns are: *go in the corner and think about what you've done to grammar*.
You're grounded? Or *your* grounded?

Diderot (to Borges, quietly):
Grammar terrorism. It's happening again.

Borges:
I tried to warn you. She brought Latin back.

Diderot (to Pratalia, louder now):
So… drunk and *what*?

Pratalia (gazing somewhere both wistful and wine-soaked):

So, after a bottle of Cabernet—or five—Jorge Luis
Borges (the Argentinian, *not* your dog)
Promised me the other night
That he'd speak personally with the Persian.
But the poets' heaven is a bit crowded these days—
Maybe I'll get a job as an usher or a scribe.
I'll have to polish his mirrors,
Transcribe quatrains for Khayyam…
But a laurel as a minor genius,
On his honor—won't be denied me.

Pascal (staring into the middle distance like a cat who saw the void and it winked):
Yep. We're fucked.

Borges (sighs deeply, tail swishing):
Goodbye, reality. It's been weird.

Gen Z (confused, scrolling TikTok for emotional support):
What is this your saying?

Diderot (snaps, full teacher mode activated):
BACK. IN. THE. CORNER.
And no phone privileges until you understand the subjunctive.

[A pause. The sound of Gen Z slinking off. A single "okay boomer" echoes faintly like a dying Wi-Fi signal.]

Pratalia (already pouring more wine into a glass shaped like Aristotle's head):
Now, who's got a mirror and a dead Persian poet on speed dial?

[The universe coughs politely.]

Pratalia:
You know what, Diderot,
They're not bad kids, this Gen Z. Sure, they tear up books and manuals like it's a sport,
Then collapse into detox treatments of pure cynicism.
They've got pale faces and fragile little smiles—

Especially if you dare mention *structuralism*.
Still, I kind of like them. Ever since I met Descartes, really.
Imagine, though—what if the stories I write, like those about you, were reviewed by Roland Barthes?

Gen Z (perking up like meerkats near a self-help bookstore):
We are not afraid of structuralism!

Pascal (ears flicking, tail twitching like a Nietzschean trap):
Oh really? *Please*, enlighten us.

Gen Z (clearly bluffing, eyes darting like nervous prey):
Eeeehm… you first.

All (in beautiful terrifying unison, like Gregorian sarcasm):
BACK. IN. THE. CORNER.

[Gen Z drifts backward like embarrassed fog.]

Diderot (smirking):
Next they'll say Derrida is just a TikTok dance.

Borges (dog version, tail sweeping the footnotes):
I give them three days before they start calling Wittgenstein "Witty."

Pratalia (sighing, eyes half on the stars, half on a parking meter):
You know, Diderot, beloved character of mine,
Sometimes I feel like I'm just stealing words from others.
Whole thoughts. Whole styles. Like I'm renting language from dead men with better resumes.

Diderot (smiling like he's about to spill cabernet on a first edition):
Well, as Dario Fo said—
Mediocres copy. Geniuses steal.

Pascal (tail coiled, sharpening a clause):
And, *quod erat demonstrandum*, that quote belongs to T. S. Eliot.

Diderot:
Exactly my point.

Pascal:
That's literally what "quod erat demonstrandum" means.

Borges (wagging slightly):
Guys, guys, tune it down. You're scaring Gen Z.

Gen Z (crouched behind a traffic cone, clutching an e-reader and a therapy app):
Mummy and Daddy are fighting…
In Latin…
About Nobel Laureates…

[Beat.]

Pratalia (light):
See? They're learning.
Fear is the first step.

Diderot:
Followed closely by sarcasm and a deep mistrust of anthologies.

[Somewhere, where rooms are hexagonal, a book misquotes itself.]

Gen Z:
May we remind you that, according to our notes, we are *still* looking for:
a) Who's writing us now;
b) How we came to this?

Pascal (stretching like a scholar at dawn):
Well… when they're right, they're right.

Borges (sniffing the wind for intertextuality):
And they're right.

Pratalia and Diderot (in smug, synchronized chaos):
And *their* right.

Gen Z (with a dead stare and a deep sigh):
That was way unnecessary.

[A collective silence. Somewhere, a comma weeps.]

Diderot (checking his sleeve for more Latin):
Look, you want answers? Get in line. Even *I* don't know who's writing me anymore. For all I know, I was ghostwritten by a hungover librarian with a Camus complex.

Pratalia (dramatic, gesturing to the invisible horizon):
We are all footnotes in someone else's tragedy, darlings.

Borges:
Or worse—someone's *Pinterest mood board*.

Pascal (yawning):
Frankly, I blame the Enlightenment. Too much light, not enough plot armor.

Gen Z (quietly, texting):
Can someone please just reboot us in a sitcom? With laugh tracks? And rules?

Borges (to Pascal):
Do you think they're ready for metafiction?

Pascal:
They're still trying to conjugate "whose." Let's wait.

[Cue piano: "Where everybody knows your name…" echoing through the metaphysical rift like a sitcom laugh track haunting the void.]

[Enter: NORM, unchanged by time, space, or moral consequence.]

Everyone except Gen Z:
NOOOOORM!

Norm (already slouching, gravity itself too tired to resist):
Cut the small talk. Gimme a beer.

[POP. A bar assembles out of nowhere. Wood panels, sticky floors, and an atmosphere made entirely of 1980s reruns. Behind the bar stands

Borges—the dog. No opposable thumbs, no problem. Bowtie on. Towel around neck.]

Borges (tilting head wisely):
How's life treating you, Norm?

Norm (sitting on a stool):
Like I just ran over a dog.

Borges (hurt):
What the bark, Norm?

Norm (rubbing temples):
Forget it. Rough day. I spent all morning sawing together rips in the fabric of the universe.

[Everyone leans in.]

Norm (with solemn, drunken poetry):
Taffeta.
It wrinkles so easily.

[Pause. Borges slides him a beer.]

Gen Z (huddled together):
Wait—who *is* he?

Pratalia (wiping jelly corpse residue from her brow):
He's a a warning. Never stop watching syndication. It's where memory goes to fossilize.

Pascal (clinking a glass with a claw):
And where philosophy orders a double and pretends it isn't crying.

[The jukebox flickers. It plays a slowed-down lo-fi remix of the Cheers theme in reverse. Time pauses, then hiccups.]

Norm (raising glass):
To everyone who's ever been written into a corner... and drank their way out.

Everyone:
Cheers!

Gen Z (terrified):
Wait wait wait… we're roaming into boomer

territory now.

Gen Z 1: Like when… they *indulged* in people being alcoholics.

Gen Z 2: And normalized *booze*!

Norm (rising like Dionysus after tax season)**:**

Mr. Booze!

Everyone else (pointing upward)**:**

Mr. Boooooze!

🎶 **Mister B, Double O, Z EEEEEEE**

🎶 That sure spells **booze**!

🎶 You will wind up wearing **tattered shoes**

🎶 If you mess with Mister **Booze!**

(*Don't mess with Mister Booze! Don't mess with Mister Booze!*)

Gen Z (huddled like orphans outside a jazz funeral):

Who are these people?

Why do they know the choreography?
Why is the dog tap dancing??

Pratalia (shaking maracas):
It's called *culture*, children.
Unfiltered, problematic, and performed nightly at the intersection of Sinatra and collapse.

Diderot (spinning in a circle):
Also, *this* is your intervention.
Not about the drinking. About never having watched *Robin and the 7 Hoods.*

Pascal (doing jazz paws):
Repent! Or be converted into a musical number!

🎶 *Don't mess with Mister Booze!*
🎶 *He'll take your mind, your soul, your shoes!*
🎶 *He's cool, he's smooth, he never snooze…*
🎶 *He's Rat Pack Wrath with morning news!*

Gen Z (sobbing into vape clouds):
We just wanted a debate!
Not… Sinatra-themed purgatory!

Borges:
You should've read the terms and conditions.

Norm:
Bottoms up, kiddos.
It only gets weirder from here.

Gen Z:

Isn't anyone paying attention? rips in reality...
through which corpses fall?

Pratalia:

I already wrote this. In several Diderot books.

Diderot:

Confirm

Gen Z:

Mr. Norm, what did you mean by "sawing together rips in the fabric of reality"? And what's a taffeta?

Norm (turns slowly on his stool, eyes bloodshot from too much truth and too little sleep):
Taffeta, kid, is what the universe puts on when it wants to impress the laws of physics at a cocktail party. It's shiny. It's stiff. It crinkles like forgotten love letters and tears like hope in a blender. Now imagine the cosmos wearing it… and catching itself on a doorknob made of irony.

Gen Z (blinking):
So… reality rips?

Norm:
Not rips. *Tears.* Fine distinction. A rip is accidental. A tear… well, sometimes the author just gets tired. Or poetic. Or drunk.

Borges (dog, pouring beer somehow):
It's always the same. First comes the tear. Then the confusion. Then the corpse. Then the jazz.

Gen Z (looking increasingly distressed):
Wait—so we're *in* something written? By someone else?

Norm (nods):
Yup. And badly proofread at that. Your existence is punctuation-dependent.

Gen Z:
That's… that's not okay. That's super not okay. That's like, illegal in several safe spaces.

Pratalia (with theatrical weariness):
You think I wanted this? I was just trying to write a clever absurdist piece on epistemological disintegration through collapsing genres. But now *you're* here, and Norm's stitching taffeta with a universe-threading needle, and I think we passed irony three exits ago.

Gen Z (tapping phone nervously):
Okay but like... if this is a narrative, can we opt out? Hit unsubscribe? Choose a better story?

Diderot:
Nope. We're in this like a post-structuralist in a labyrinth. The only way out is deeper in.

Pascal:
Use the butter.

Gen Z:
We demand answers!

Norm (raising his glass):
Then here's one:
Don't tug the seams unless you're ready for the stuffing to scream.

(Silence. A slow rustle. Somewhere distant, a giggle. Then—)

SPLAT.

Another corpse through the ceiling. Wearing tap shoes this time.

Borges (casually):
Broadway's leaking again.

Pratalia (wiping corpse-jelly off her cheek with the dignity of someone used to stranger things):
I know, I know. I always do this—narrational absurdism, fourth-wall graffiti, a sprinkle of epistemic despair… then jazz numbers. Often tap dancing. Sometimes synchronized existential doubt in iambic pentameter. But *this*… this is way beyond my style.

Diderot:
You've lost control, darling. This is no longer a book. It's a spontaneous ontological combustion.

Pascal (sniffing at the tap-dancing corpse):
Smells like Sartre and burnt shoe polish.

Gen Z:
Okay but—who greenlit this? Who gave this whole situation the thumbs-up emoji?

Borges (licking human jelly off his paw):
Nobody. That's the point. It's jazz, kid. You riff, you fall, you bleed meaning. Or you just… scat.

Norm (raises his glass):
To broken continuity, inconsistent tone, and authorship hemorrhaging from multiple metaphysical wounds!

Everyone (except Gen Z):
Cheers!

Gen Z (horrified):
We're surrounded by literary constructs with trauma and drinking problems!

Pratalia (sighs, gazing at the ceiling):
No… you're surrounded by *yourself*. You just didn't know the mirror had dialogue.

Gen Z:
That's... that's so Tumblr-core.

Diderot (to Borges):
How long until another corpse?

Borges:
Give it a minute. I think Nietzsche's queued.

[And then THUMP. One sound, two bodies. Not human bodies, Galilean bodies. A wooden ball, a lead ball, same diameter, hitting the ground exactly at the same time.]

Pratalia: has an epiphany.

Pratalia: (to Diderot)

Character....

Diderot: (to Pratalia)

Author...?

Pratalia:

Character!

Diderot:

Author?!

Pratalia:

Simplicius!

Diderot:

Don't call me that

Pratalia:

If I am your "official" author, like "recognized, notharized"...

Diderot:

And you are, because... oh no.... oh no

Pratalia:

whoever is writing the story now is writing you, and Borges, and Pascal. My "official" inventions... therefore....

Diderot: oh no...

Pratalia:

yes!

Pascal:

oh don't go there...

Pratalia:

it's the only interpretation!

Borges:

change exegesis!

Pratalia:

it's the only exegesable! The pretentious author is... apocryphal

Diderot, Borges, Pascal:

Noooooooooo

Gen Z:

what what what? what did we miss?

From the depths of history, faint and dusty but somehow Bluetooth-enabled:

Irenaeus of Lyon (materializing as a hologram made of Latin footnotes): *Told ya.*

Council of Carthage (397 CE, speaking in unison like a Gregorian barbershop quartet): *Told yaaaa.*

Gen Z (squinting): Who the hell are *these* guys? Is this a crossover episode with *Assassin's Creed*?

Diderot (rubbing temples): No, no, no. This is ecclesiastical canon enforcement. We're being audited by orthodoxy.

Pascal: And by *orthodoxy* we mean literary dogma.
Borges: And by *audited*, we mean *about to be redacted out of existence*.

Gen Z 2 (scrolling through air): Ugh, it's like every TikTok comment thread where someone says, "Read the Council of Nicaea before posting."
Gen Z 1: Who *are* these people?

Irenaeus (smugly): *I* coined the term "heresy," thank you very much.
Council of Carthage: *And we decided which gospels were in. Spoiler alert: yours wasn't.*

Pratalia (snapping): ENOUGH! This isn't about gospels, or creeds, or 4th-century manuscript drama! This is about authorship. Ownership. Metanarrative sovereignty. This is about *me*—and the fact that someone out there is writing my characters, hijacking my style, and raining Kierkegaards on my sidewalk!

Diderot (muttering): And using Galilean physics like a doorbell.

Pratalia (pointing at the void): WHOEVER YOU ARE, I KNOW YOU'RE THERE. TYPING.

SMIRKING. THINKING YOU'RE CLEVER WITH YOUR MIX OF PSEUDO-PHILOSOPHICAL POSTMODERN SLAPSTICK.
Well guess what?

She draws a pen. A real one. Fountain. Montblanc.

Pratalia: *I can write back.*

Pascal (worried): Pratalia, please, don't do this. Remember what happened to Unamuno.

Borges: He got written *out* of his own story.

Gen Z: Wait, can that happen to us?

Council of Carthage (approvingly): Yes.

Irenaeus (nodding): And it will.

Diderot: This whole structure is destabilizing faster than a freshman's philosophy midterm. We need to anchor the narrative or *at least* reset the POV hierarchy.

Gen Z 1: Can we have subtitles or something?

Suddenly: a huge typewriter key smashes into the pavement. It's the key for "~".

All turn to Pratalia.

Pratalia (whispers): A tilde…
Pascal: That's not a letter. That's a *warning.*

Norm (from the bar, sipping): It begins.

Diderot: We destroyed the Catholic Apostolic Church *twice*. Once in Rome, with Anti-Cool. Once in Avignon, with actual weapons. We can't now turn around and defend the *apostolic canon*.

Pratalia (gritting her teeth): Not the *apostolic* canon, you powdered imbecile. *Your* canon. *Mine*. We're not defending religion—we're defending *authorship*. Fight the *apocryphal appropriation of narration*, and we'll figure out copyright once the bodies stop falling.

Gen Z (arms flailing): What? What? Whaaaaat? You guys keep talking in riddles and war crimes!

Pascal (tenderly): Here. Have some Play-Doh. Be good. Sculpt a little Derrida. Let the adults sort out this metafictional breach of sovereignty.

Gen Z (taking the Play-Doh reluctantly): Can I make a TikTok of it?

Pascal: No.

Pratalia (pointing at the sky): Look. The rift's opening again. Get ready.

THWUMP. A sandal hits the pavement. Then a satchel. Then a copy of *Bakunin for Beginners*. Then—

SPLAF. A corpse. Threadbare black overcoat. "NO GODS NO MASTERS" stitched on the back in lovingly ironic cross-stitch. One eye still twitching out of sheer ideological spite.

Diderot (dusting off his coat): Aaaand, here we go. Anarchists falling out of windows. *Fo*, where are you, you magnificent bastard?

Dario Fo (emerging from a cloud of Commedia dell'Arte fog, juggling Molotov cocktails): *Buonasera*, Diderot! Long time no see! You still meddling with narrative determinism?

Borges (sprinting full speed, tail like a wind vane, and launching into Fo's arms): Since *Panacea*, Dario! You had me at *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*! *Slurp slurp slurp.*

Pascal (grooming his ear nonchalantly): I always act *La fame dello Zanni* to get extra treats.

Gen Z (now sculpting a disturbingly accurate model of Roland Barthes in Play-Doh): Who is this guy and why is he getting French-kissed by a dog?

Pratalia (already scribbling notes): Fo rewrote everything. Made the stage into a riot. We may need

him if this whole meta-narrative breaks into full-blown insurrection.

Diderot: Into? Darling, look around. We're three corpses past that.

Fo (grinning like Mephistopheles with a theatre grant): Shall I call Franca?

Pascal (eyes wide): If Franca Rame descends from the sky, I'm converting. No gods, no masters, but plenty of *divas*.

Franca Rame: "Dario, we said drinking only after noon."

Fo:
"Love, it's always noon somewhere."

Franca (arms crossed, foot tapping):
"Oh yeah, Mr. Nobel Prize smarty pants? Then I'm calling Enzo."

Diderot:
"May I comment: not the brightest call for sobriety? Still fully agree."

—And then, as if conjured by a Milanese stage whisper, Enzo Jannacci materializes out of pure narrative whimsy, adjusting an invisible tie and raising an eyebrow as if he never truly left.

Jannacci (grinning sideways):
"Ah beh, sì beh… *Ho visto un re!*"

Diderot (jumping to his feet like a child at a Punch and Judy show):
"*Sa l'ha vist cus'è?*"

Borges, already spinning in circles:
"*Ha visto un re!*"

All (except the baffled, eternally alienated Gen Z):
"*Ah, beh; sì, beh!*"

Jannacci, now seated on a cloud shaped like a Vespa, croons:

"*Un re che piangeva seduto sulla sella, piangeva tante lacrime, ma tante che bagnava anche il cavallo!*"

Pascal, visibly moved:
"*Povero re…*"

Everyone else (again, except Gen Z):
"*E povero anche il cavallo!—Sì, beh; ah, beh.—Sì, beh; ah, beh.*"

Gen Z just stands there, mouths open like fish in Wi-Fi outage, trying to decipher if this is protest theatre, a glitch in the timeline, or some kind of Italian TikTok trend. One of them timidly opens their Notes app, but gives up.

Meanwhile, Diderot, now inexplicably in a Neapolitan mask and juggling olives, turns toward the imaginary fourth wall.

Diderot:
"This is what happens when narrative authority

collapses. Welcome to epistemological commedia dell'arte, kids. There's no syllabus. Just tears, horses, and metaphors that drink grappa."

Jannacci, still strumming an invisible accordion:
"*E sempre allegri bisogna stare, ché il nostro piangere fa male al re...*"

Diderot: "Guys, don't despair. We're getting a grasp on it. At least now people who actually *fell* are falling. We're getting closer to reality."

Pascal (twirling a Newtonian apple on one finger like a Harlem Globetrotter of theological doubt): "Yeah, *Fall 2.0* is the new Fall."

From the cobblestone cracks of metaphysical Europe, the entire city of Prague rises like a Kafkaesque chorus of haunted spires and existential bureaucracy:
"We told ya all!"

Cue the ancient, bitter grunts of Spartan babies—yes, those tossed from cliffs for being too poetic, now climbing back with six-packs and trauma in their tiny eyes:
"FUCK YOU ALL, THANK YOU VERY MUCH!"

One baby crushes a soft cheese with its bare hand. Another deadlifts a fully grown Nietzsche, who mutters, "God is dead, but this kid's got delts."

Borges:
"Something's coming. I smell metaphor."

Pratalia:
"We're past absurd. We're in recursive allegory."

Gen Z (clutching phones now useless, eyes darting):
"What's happening?? Why are Spartan babies swearing at us? And why is that city speaking Czech *and* Latin?!"

Diderot :
“Because, dear children, we are now… *post-narrative.*”

Fo (arms wide like an emcee announcing the end of rational thought):
“Pratalia, haven’t you noticed your *tempo teatrale* now demands an *intermezzo musicale*?”

Pratalia (curtsying with a flourish that makes her scarf dramatically leap into another dimension):
“Well, I have, Maestro, thank you for noticing!”

Fo:
“What are you waiting for, then?”

Pratalia (hands raised like a jazz conductor possessed by Cole Porter’s ghost):
“For *them* to notice that—‘**Times have chaaaanged**!’”

Fo (launching into perfect pitch):
“**Aaaaand we've often rewound the clock,**

Since the Puritans got a shock,
When they landed on Plymouth Rock."

Jannacci (leaping in from a trapdoor no one saw being installed):
"If today,
Any shock they should try to stem,
'Stead of landing on Plymouth Rock,
Plymouth Rock would land on theeeeeem."

All but Gen Z (in top hats, fishnets, and inexplicably synchronized feather boas):
In olden days a glimpse of stocking
Was looked on as something shocking,
But now, God knows,
Anything Goes!

Pascal (doing a surprisingly accurate Charleston):
"Even Calvin would've popped a monocle at this."

Diderot (swinging from a chandelier that wasn't there five seconds ago):
"Finally! A logical structure I can dance to!"

Borges (behind the bar, stirring a martini):
“I’ve never felt more at home.”

Gen Z (horrified):
“WHY is everyone singing ? Is this… *tap dancing history*?!”

Franca Rame (deadpans while pouring herself a Scotch):
“Relax, bambini. This is still better than TikTok.”

Cue jazz hands. Cue existential dread in glitter.

And somewhere, offstage, *Plymouth Rock* shrugs and rolls off a cliff.

Chorus (in harmony so tight it could sue for harassment):
🎶 *The world has gone mad today*
And good's bad today
And black's white today
And day's night today
And that gent today

You gave a cent today
Once had several chateaux! 🎶

A Marxist mermaid pirouettes past Gen Z, who are filming but ironically.

🎶 *When folks who still can ride in jitneys*
Find out Vanderbilts and Whitneys
Lack baby clo'es
Anything GOOOOES! 🎶

Spotlight widens. Pratalia glows.

Pascal:
"She's not just breaking the fourth wall, she's redecorating it."

Diderot:
"This is what Barthes meant. Probably."

Gen Z (still confused, now clutching emotional support LaCroix):
"What... what are jitneys? And why is *everything* dancing?!"

Pratalia (spinning, triumphant):
"Because, dearest... the author is drunk, the canon is bleeding, and the musical number never ends."

[Scene: The sky above reality—already fragile, stitched with taffeta and sarcasm—splits with the gentle sigh of an overworked metaphor. A single object falls: not a sword, nor a plague, nor another misunderstood academic. Just… a fountain pen. Elegant. Leaking ink like memory. Lands with a delicate *plop*.]

PASCAL (eyes wide, tail twitching): Keep the absurd, guys! It's working!

[A klieg light flashes. Everyone flinches. A spotlight lands on Dario Fo, who stands center-stage, one foot already unconsciously tapping.]

FO (dramatically): *I won't dance! Don't ask me!*

[A piano, uninvited and self-aware, begins tinkling out Jerome Kern chords from a corner of the cosmos.]

JANNACCI (stepping forward like a guilty pleasure):
I won't dance, madame, with you,
My heart won't let my feet do things they should do…

[Borges howls melodically. Pratalia throws on a feather boa made of discarded footnotes. Diderot dons a hat he swears isn't symbolic. The narrative begins to sway.]

[Gravity loosens. Music swells. Characters—named, unnamed, plagiarized—tap dance across the collapsing timeline, leaving behind footprints shaped like interrobangs.]

[The air crackles. Not with lightning, not with tension—well, yes, also that—but mostly with syncopation. Something invisible has started

swinging. Somewhere, a time signature loses its balance and Dave Brubeck catches it mid-fall, 5/4 smirk on his face.]

GEN Z (totally not dancing): What what what now? What's happening?!

DAVE BRUBECK (on a translucent Steinway, floating midair):
Chaos and improvisation, you minions.
Structure is for cowards.

[The piano begins a smooth, dissonant groove. A metronome explodes from sheer existential panic.]

DIDEROT (adjusting imaginary cufflinks):
They all laughed at Christopher Columbus,
When he said the world was round...

PASCAL (tail slapping rhythmically):
They all laughed when Edison recorded sound.

BORGES (snout to the heavens):
They all laughed at Wilbur and his brother,
When they said that man could fly...

PRATALIA (stepping into the light, feather boa once again alive and snarling):
(Is it my turn? Good.)
They told Marconi wireless was a phony,
It's the same old cry—

ALL (in a swinging crescendo, hips entirely unsupervised):
They laughed at me wanting you,
Said I was reaching for the moon—
But oh, you came through,
Now they'll have to change their tune!

GEN Z (cornered, swaying): This isn't even TikTok-synchronized!

ALL (ignoring Gen Z, grinning, kicking higher):
They all said we never could be happy,
They laughed at us and how!

But ho, ho, ho!
Who's got the last laugh now?

[Jannacci throws his fedora in the air. Dario Fo catches it with a pirouette. Brubeck punches a C7#9 into the clouds. The sky bursts into applause.]

GEN Z: Is this… is this jazz?

PASCAL (handing them Play-Doh again): No. This is literary survival. Keep sculpting your pronouns, sweetheart.

BORGES (panting, tail wagging, unhinged):
Go on, guys, go on! More Pratalia nonsense!

PRATALIA (channeling chaos, arms wide):
Lobster Thermidor à la Crevette with a Mornay sauce served in a Provençale manner with shallots and aubergines, garnished with truffle pâté, brandy... and with a fried egg on top—
(beat)
...and spam.

[Silence. Glorious silence. The sort of silence only achievable after the phrase “and spam” has been weaponized.]

BORGES (collapsing in laughing howls):
Have you got anything without spam?

PASCAL (cackling tears running down his whiskers, curled on the floor):
Well… there’s spam egg sausage and spam… that’s not got much spam in it!

[The void emits a deep, satisfied sigh. A trumpet plays a B ♭ out of sheer approval. Somewhere, Samuel Beckett nods from a bar stool made entirely of dead puns.]

DIDEROT (arms raised like Moses parting a deli menu):
Well, if this doesn’t do it…

[The void *hiccups*. A pixelated rainbow flutters through the ceiling. Out of it, a MAN slips. And Spam.]

PRATALIA (whispers):
...we may have reached peak nonsense.

BORGES (sniffs sandwich):
This smells like… victory. And smoked gouda.

GEN Z (off-screen, muffled):
Can someone explain what just happened?

PASCAL (still wheezing):
What *happens*, child… is spam. Always spam. Everything else is décor.

[The man blinks, as if rebooting an outdated operating system. He adjusts his belt, rises from the lemon-logic-smudged floor with the grace of an unplugged refrigerator.]

ALL (eyebrows united):
So it was you? Appropriating apocryphal writing?

GUY (dusting existential lint from his khakis):
Oh, shooting big words artillery, aren't we? *Appropriating... apocryphal...* Well, it seemed like an opportunity. You left so many dangling footnotes.

BORGES (tilting his head like a scholarly spaniel):
Who *are* you anyway?

GUY (with the dignity of a man who once overcooked the pasta for Derrida):
I'm Mr. Stephens. Head of Catering.

[Silence. The kind that spreads like a stain.]

DIDEROT:
Well, my tray was wet.

PASCAL:
I specifically asked for *no* peas in my penne all'arrabbiata.

PRATALIA (clapping each word like a judicial gavel):

And. I. Specifically. Wanted. You. *Out* of my writing identity.

MR. STEPHENS (hands raised in the international gesture of buffet-related innocence):
I just brought the napkins, all right? Then *boom,* the fourth wall sneezed, the third act caved in, and next thing I know I'm in a metanarrative showdown with a dog, a philosopher, and a woman wielding exegesis like it's a blunt object.

GEN Z (scrolling on four phones simultaneously):
Can someone TL;DR this? Who's the dude? Is he canon? Is he *cancelled*?

DIDEROT (glaring):
Are you even licensed to break the fourth wall, Stephens?

MR. STEPHENS (shrugging):
I brought cheese platters to the Theatre of the Absurd. I once made Voltaire an omelette so

confusing it inspired *Candide*. I've seen things—artisanal things.

PRATALIA (menacingly calm):
You're not narrative. You're garnish.

MR. STEPHENS (muttering):
And yet here I am, seasoning your story.

[At this, a bread roll spins out of nowhere and knocks his dignity slightly to the left.]

[A pause. Then—]

GEN Z:
Wait, so like, is he the author or the caterer?

ALL (in one collective existential groan):
YES.

PRATALIA (arms crossed, eyes narrowed):
Mr. Stephens, good old evil character. Would you mind revealing your real face? You know, just for posterity?

[Mr. Stephens exhales like an industrial kettle and slowly turns, the air warping slightly around him.]

[His face begins to split vertically, with all the grace of a melon in a philosophy lecture. On the left: Pennywise, in full gory, gum-bleeding, balloon-wielding glory. On the right: Freddy Krueger, skin like day-old lasagna and eyes that say "Union rules do not apply in dreams."]

PRATALIA (wincing):
That is *highly* disturbing. And I've burned priests alive with Gregorian chants playing in reverse. I always avoided *this* kind of imagery in my books.

MR. STEPHENS (deadpan, teeth clicking softly):
Sure thing. Let me slip into something more... neurotically beige.

[He turns again. *Poof.* He's now Diane Keaton as Annie Hall. Vintage vest. Tie. Soft, confused smile. Eyebrows knitted in Manhattanian concern.]

ALL (screaming, full Technicolor):
AAAAAAHGH NOOOOO! BACK BACK BACK!

BORGES (spinning in a panic):
She's going to start mumbling about Paul Simon and relationships!

DIDEROT (choking on the word 'neurosis'):
I *felt* a New Yorker article forming inside my soul!

MR. STEPHENS (mercifully reverting, now back to the previous horror-state):
Better?

[He stands there, once again vertically split: left half Pennywise, right half Freddy Krueger. The lighting dims. The floor sighs in relief.]

ALL (in religious gratitude):
Dear God—*much* better.

PRATALIA (gesturing vaguely at the air, as if swatting away the ghost of a turtleneck):

Diane Keaton is always divine. But Annie as a character? Who would want *that* egg?

GEN Z (all of them, blinking like confused Siri units):
Egg? What egg?

PASCAL (already halfway through the popcorn bag):
Just watch the movie. You can pirate it morally—it's Woody Allen.

BORGES (wagging tail with impatient dignity):
Oh come on, let them understand this one. This is easy. It's not like anarchists falling through semiotic tears in narrative space.

FO (stepping forward like a prophet of Vaudeville):
A guy walks into a psychiatrist's office and says, *"Hey doc, my brother's crazy! He thinks he's a chicken."*
And the doc says, *"Why don't you turn him in?"*
And the guy says, *"I would—but I need the eggs."*

GEN Z 1 (tentative):
Wait… is the egg a metaphor?

GEN Z 2 (Googling):
No wait… it's *actually* about Freud's theory of repetition compulsion, right?

GEN Z 3 (quietly sobbing):
We just wanted to understand the spam joke…

MR. STEPHENS' PENNYWISE HALF (grinning like an unpaid intern at the meat factory):
It's all about floating.

MR. STEPHENS' KRUEGER HALF (voice like a fork dragging across insomnia):
And if you ever dream about this… give me a call. First nightmare's free.

DIDEROT (to Pratalia, adjusting a monocle he wasn't wearing before):
We're reaching peak reference density. Another egg metaphor and the page will physically curl inward.

MR. STEPHENS (both halves speaking in disturbing, perfectly syncopated stereo, like an evil barbershop duo):
So. I'm here. So, Pratalia—

PUFF.

Pratalia vanishes like a magician with a vendetta against conclusions, leaving behind only a faint smell of roasted typewriter ribbon and cheap Chianti.

PRATALIA (voice from the void, omnidirectional, smug):
Aaaaaaaaand I'm authoring again!

– FIN –
Curtain slams down like a guillotine powered by narrative exhaustion.

GEN Z (from behind curtain, confused, betrayed, emotionally constipated):
Whaaaaat? It ends like—

CUE: “DON’T STOP BELIEVIN’” by Journey.

Blackout.

The universe winks.

EPISTEMOLOGY, CHAOS, JAZZ.

A book unlike any other—a fugue, a fever, a seduction. *Pratalia, Gen Z, then arrives Diderot* is a bold, incendiary ode to knowledge: not as utility, but as rapture; not as accumulation, but as an ecstatic, sensual intoxication. It is a love letter written in footnotes and fragments, in Catullus and Rawls, in the whispered grammar of vanished tongues.

At once erotically intellectual, metaphysical and irreverent, this work is a celebration of the mind's deepest hunger: the desire to touch meaning with bare hands, to taste philosophy like wine, to be ravished by language. It is a text of collisions—between epochs, between thinkers, between pleasure and inquiry—composed with fierce wit, feverish lyricism, and a defiant refusal to be simple.

Alba Pratalia has not merely written a play. She has summoned a storm of thought, clothed it in velvet and paradox, and dared us to step into its embrace.